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ABSTRACT

Issues related to the future of bilingual education are discussed in this brief paper. Points of controversy concerning bilingual education are pointed out and three philosophical approaches to, or models for, bilingual education are briefly described. The view of critics who see bilingual education as educationally unsound are mentioned and data about the educational experience of culturally diverse populations in the United States are introduced as part of an argument that a return to past practices requiring cultural assimilation is not a justifiable policy. It is further argued that such traditional educational practices violate basic American principles of freedom and human rights. Research findings countering the view that bilingualism is an outward sign of poor intellectual functioning are cited. Additional studies, indicating the positive outcomes of bilingual abilities and programs, are cited and briefly described, and it is concluded that the growth of the Hispanic population necessitates the attainment of some semblance of equal educational opportunity. (Author/RH)

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BILINGUAL MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

ISSUES - RESEARCH - RATIONALE

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BILINGUAL/MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

ISSUES - RESEARCH - RATIONALE

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"Hispanics can look forward to the day when their native language is no longer regarded as inferior, when it no longer offers the excuse for an ethnic slur and a means of destroying the self-confidence and self-esteem of a child."[1]

"Bilingual education is certainly not a total panacea, but if it proves an effective measure for helping Hispanic children to develop the self-confidence and ability to perform well in school and stay there until they gain the needed credentials, then its implementation on the widest possible scale may be justified, for the alternatives are bleak indeed."[2]

More now than before reports, research, and new publications are available proclaiming the validity, worth and significance of bilingual education in the United States of America. The opening statement is of Mr. Alan Pifer, President of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. His annual statement on an issue of current interest addresses a major issue in America's educational system. It is the issue of Bilingual Education.

In the following presentation, the current state of the art of bilingual multicultural education will be addressed. Moreover, a review of some recent findings ard the effect of this knowledge will be examined. It is without a doubt that there are many issues to be resolved if bilingual education is to survive as a pedagogical method.

Pifer sees bilingual education under attack due to three points of controversy. First, public perceptions have labeled bilingual education as not effective. "Leading critics.. conclude that the concept itself,

[1]Pifer, Alan, "Bilingual education and the Hispanic challenge," The Report of the President, 1979 Annual Report, Carnegie Corporation of New York, New York, 1979, pp. 15.

[2]Ibid., pp. 18.

as opposed to its implementation, is unsound."[3] Second, many people see it as a deviation from solid American tradition. Schools have historically enforced assimilation and English learning. "Bilingual education therefore seems to be challenging ... traditional assumptions and practices regarding cultural assimiliation."[4] Third, this pedagogical approach is seen as threatening. "Bilingual education is no longer regarded as an educational measure but also as a strategy for realizing the social, political, and economic aspirations of Hispanic peoples."[5] Therefore, as Hispanics and other linguistically different groups enter into the 80's, we must be ready to respond to assumptions that are being made and directed toward the educational approach of bilingual education.

To begin with, there are many definitions and types of bilingual education programs. "Bilingualism is broadly defined by Weinreich (1953) as 'the practice of alternately using two languages'."[6] While a bilingual program "usually refers to programs that employ a child's native tongue as a medium of instruction while he or she is being helped to learn English."[7]

There are basically three philosophical approaches to accomplish this goal. First, there is the transitional mode. The transitional approach to bilingual education directs the energies of the teaching/learning

[3]Ibid., pp.3.
[4]Ibid., pp.5.
[5]Ibid., pp.5.
[6]Albert, Martin L. and Loraine K. Obler, The Bilingual Brain, Neuropsychological and Neurolinguistic Aspects of Bilingualism, Academic Press, 1978, pp. 4.
[7]Ibid., Pifer, 1979, pp.3.

process towards the assimilation of the bilingual. The goal is therefore, to promote a prompt transition from the native language and culture towards a mainstream mode. The second philosophical approach is one of maintenance. This method strives to assist the bilingual person to maintain the native language and culture while learning of the mainstream language and culture. The third philosophy is an enrichment model. In this approach the person is encouraged to grow in the native language and culture while learning the new language and culture. There are different approaches and definitions for a bilingual program. But they all focus on the acquisition of a wider range of language and cultural abilities.

This leads to another issue of bilingual education. Critics see bilingual education as unsound. They often propose that bilinguals are unable to function in either language and that bilingual education only promotes cognitive dissonance and limited linguistic and intellectual functioning. Hopefully the return to the past is not suggested as an alternative. The poor record of the past is what precipitated the methodological approaches of bilingual education.

The history of the American educational system has been one of neglect of the culturally diverse populations of America. This neglect has resulted in the following:

> The median number of school years completed by White Anglo-Saxon Americans is 12.0 school years. Whereas, the median number of school years completed by Mexican Americans is 8.1 years, 8.6 years by Puerto Ricans, and 9.8 years by Native Americans.
>
> This information that was found in a .. study by the United States Commission on Civil Rights (1975), also found that 40 percent of Mexican Americans who enter

first grade never complete high school. As of 1972, Puerto Ricans of New York City had a 57 percent dropout rate from tenth grade to graduation.

In the Southwest United States, the dropout rate for Native Americans between the grades of nine and twelve is 30.6 percent. A disgraceful fact is that among the Navajo Indians, the largest Native American tribe, the median educational level attained is of the fifth grade.

In 1966, Coleman's report shows that academic achievement scores recorded for language minority groups lag significantly behind the academic achievement scores for mainstream majority group Americans.

By the 12th grade the Mexican American student is 4.1 years behind the national norm in math achievement; 3.5, in verbal ability; and 3.3, in reading. The Puerto Rican student is 4.8 years behing the national norm in math; 3.6 in verbal ability; and 3.2,in reading. The Asian American student is 0.9 years behing the norm in math; 1.6, in verbal ability; and 1.6, in reading. Studies indicate that the longer language minority students stay in school the further they fall behind their classmates in grade level achievements (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1975, pp. 17-19).8

Therefore, a return to the past is definitely not a justifiable alternative.

These figures directly relate to the second issue surrounding bilingual education. Traditional practices of the educational system requiring cultural assimilation are in direct violation of basic American principles. The fundamental tenet of American democracy that all men are free and entitled to basic human rights is negated when coerced into a mode that is not within the self concept and identity of the individual.

Some of the traditional assumptions of educators about bilingualism being an outward sign of poor intellectual functioning is negated in many research studies. In a publication titled, The Bilingual Brain, Neuropsychological and Neurolinguistic Aspects of Bilingualism, an extensive review of related research is presented.9

8Trujillo, Lorenzo A., The Effect of a Hispanic Ethnic Dance Curriculum Upon High School Students' Self Concept and Academic Performance, Doctoral Dissertation, University of San Francisco, Published by University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1979, pp. 14-15.

9Ibid., Albert and Obler, 1978.

Based upon the research, the following conclusion is made:

> Of interest to educators and to parents of bilingual children is the evidence that children learning two languages from infancy are not impaired cognitively or academically. It may even be possible to conclude that bilinguals have superior language skills to those of monolinguals.[10]

Therefore, the issue of the limited functioning of bilinguals is not a valid hypothesis. To progress further, studies have not only shown bilingual education as not being a subtractive pedagogy but instead it is an additive methodology.

> Congress began to realize the failure of the educational system to provide an equal opportunity to language minority people .. in 1968. The Bilingual Education Act, 20 U.S.C. 800b, enacted January 2, 1968, P.L. 90-247, Section 702, was passed by Congress. Later,"the first expression of Executive policy in the area of equal educational opportunity for language minority students came in 1970 when the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) issued its May 25 Memorandum, which required federally funded school districts to provide assistance for language minority children. The memorandum indicated that failure to provide such assistance, where needed, would be considered a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In Lau vs. Nichols, the Supreme Court affirmed that interpretation of Title VI's scope (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1975, pp.20)."[11]

With this series of events, a change began in American education. A long history of educational neglect was the topic in educational circles. The enhancement of self concept among students, the ability to function in the English language, increased attendance and a reduced drop-out rate were among the central goals of many bilingual programs.

Once the programs were in operation they became subject to evaluations. These appraisals have demonstrated the success of bilingual programs in many areas, such as: enhanced self concept, greater academic achievement and motivation, significantly greater attendance and a reduced drop-out rate.

[10]Ibid., Albert and Obler, 1978, pp.245.
[11]Trujillo, Lorenzo A.,"Self Concept and Academic Achievement" Unpublished Manuscript, University of San Francisco, 1979, pp.44.

Of the numerous studies that are available for presentation, the research of King and the work of Cohen are salient. King proposed an investigation to find out if bilingualism had an adverse effect upon language development, the acquisition of knowledge and concepts related to the areas of social studies and science, and if it had a detrimental effect upon IQ score attainment. According to King (1976), results of the majority of research conducted in the area of bilingualism had been supportive of such ideas. But, in his investigation, in which he carried out a longitudinal study, he found that bilingualism has no adverse effect on any of the above mentioned areas of academic achievement. King's study, Bilingualism and Academic Achievement: A Comparative Study of Spanish Surnamed Bilingual, Spanish Surnamed Monolingual, and Non-Spanish Surnamed Students,[12] is of great value because it serves to negate past beliefs which are adverse to bilingualism. In Cohen's (1973) study, Innovative Education for La Raza: A Sociolinguistic Assessment of a Bilingual Education Program in California, he concluded that after three years in a bilingual/multicultural program, the children in the program viewed the Mexican culture more positively than did comparison students who had not experienced the program. Furthermore:

> Bilingual schooling appeared to have a most healthy effect upon school attendance and upon attitudes toward school. The bilingual students at the Pilot and Follow Up II levels had significantly fewer absences during both school years of the study than did the comparison students. This finding is particularly relevant, since a number of administrators remark that they could solve the problem of educating the minority students better if they could only get them to attend classes more regularly. It appears that the Bilingual Project provides an incentive for the Mexican American minority to come to school.[13]

[12]King, F. X., Bilingualism and Academic Achievement, A Comparative Study of Spanish Surnamed Bilingual, Spanish Surnamed Monolingual, and Non-Spanish Surnamed Students, Doctoral Dissertation, United States International University, 1976.

[13]Cohen, Andrew David, Innovative Education for La Raza: A Sociolinguistic Assessment of a Bilingual Education Program in California, Doctoral Dissertation, Stanford University, 1973, pp. 237-238.

Although these studies are only two of the many that are now available, they serve to validate the success of the bilingual education programs that were studied in these inquiries. Because of the quality and longitudinal nature of their work, the conclusions arrived at can be considered as probable in a similar setting given the same variables.

The significance and value of bilingualism is further developed by Martin and Obler in their conclusions based on their neuropsychological and neurolinguistic research.

> Bilinguals may differ from monolinguals by maturing earlier (both in terms of cerebral lateralization, and in acquiring linguistic abstraction skills). In adulthood, bilinguals may continue to be more verbally skillful than monolinguals. The greater verbal skills seen in bilinguals may be attributed to their cerebral organization for language, which seems to be more bilateral than that of the monolingual (pp. 206).
>
> We found strong evidence to suggest that bilinguals are better able than monolinguals to deal with abstract aspects of language, that there is greater cognitive flexibility on the part of bilinguals. Nonverbal skills are not impaired in young bilinguals, while verbal skills mature earlier. Bilinguals have greater linguistic sensitivity than monolinguals: Experience in study of a foreign language expands the individuals sensitivity to universals of phonetic symbolism (pp. 245-246).
>
> Childhood bilingualism and adult bilingualism share some developmental features and differ in others. It may be that only in the child can a truly compound system develop, as the young child is exposed to two languages. Exposure to two languages, moreover, seems to make more demands on the bilingual child than on a monolingual child, and as a result the bilingual child will develop an abstract sense for language at a younger age and may start earlier to lateralize language to the left hemisphere (pp. 222).
>
> These studies imply that knowledge of numerous languages develop the brain, whereas illiteracy keeps it underdeveloped. The last two cases suggest that the increased furrowing is not necessarily restricted to the left hemisphere, but may obtain in the right or bilaterally (pp.155). [14]

[14] Ibid., Albert and Obler, 1978.

Current research with polyglot aphasics is transferring the discipline and study of bilingual education into a significant science. "Postmortum studies of polyglot brains... give evidence that knowledge of multiple languages has anatomical consequences."[15] Dulay and Burt conclude that "neurolinguistic research is beginning to suggest that people who know more than one language make use of more of the brain than monolinguals do." They further state that "it seems that the part of the brain that is used in second language functioning remains underdeveloped in monolingual brains." To conclude this defense of bilingualism, " Albert and Obler reviewed a series of post-mortem studies on polyglot brains - brains of people who spoke from 3 to 26 languages - and found that certain parts of these brains were especially well developed and markedly furrowed."[16] These results strongly indicate increased brain functioning and usage of the bilingual person. Therefore, it would seem that bilingualism and bilingual education is a desired asset to Americans and to America.

The third issue that Pifer presents addresses the concern of Hispanic upward mobility as a result of bilingual education. The growth and fulfillment of social, political, and economic aspirations of Hispanics is vital to the welfare of America today. Hispanics are no longer a small minority to be ignored.

> "Within the next decade, we can expect Hispanics to be the largest single majority group in the country"(Harris, 1978, p. 1). This fact, as presented by the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, has been further developed by various leaders and in the public media. For example, Time Magazine of October 16, 1978 (p. 48) focused their cover story with "It's Your Turn in the Sun - Now 19 Million, and growing fast, Hispanics are becoming a power." A month earlier, September 11, 1978, New West Magazine featured an article titled, "The Decade of the Chicano - California's Emerging Third World Majority," an article which is subtitled with the statement that, "There is one inevitable fact, By 1990 California will become America's first Third World State"(Kirsch, 1978,p.35).

[15] Ibid., Albert and Obler, 1978, pp.95

[16] Dulay, Heidi and Marina Burt, "The Relative Proficiency of Limited English Proficient Students," NABE Journal, Vol. IV, No. 3, Spring, 1980, pp. 2.

> Of interest, it stated that "Mexican Americans already constitute the single largest minority in California -- some 4 million, almost 18 percent of the population... (Kirsch, 1978, p. 36). "Los Angeles already has the largest urban population outside of Mexico City, and some 29 percent of all Hispanics in the U.S. live in California" (Kirsch, 1978, p. 36).[17]

Because of this growth, it is important that some semblance of equal educational opportunity be attained. And as Pifer himself states -

"Nothing less will do."

In this essay the issues facing bilingual multicultural education were presented. Through a review of the available data and current research, these issues were categorically addressed. As a result of these efforts, it is hoped that educators, politicians, and the public and private sectors will be able to more fully comprehend the significance and value of bilingualism and bilingual education for all people in America today and moreover for the America of tomorrow.

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[17] Ibid., Trujillo, 1979, pp. 16.

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